

Message Text

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ACTION PA-02

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 PRS-01 CU-04 CIAE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 INRE-00 SS-15 L-03 SP-02 SCA-01

/048 W

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O R 101405Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 822

INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

USIA WASHDC

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STATE FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARTER (PA), EUR/SOV, USIA FOR IEU

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: OGEN SOPN UR US AFSP

SUBJECT: CORRESPONDENTS SEEK ASSISTANCE ON SOVIET RENT HIKES

1. REPRESENTATIVES ALL MAJOR AMERICAN MEDIA ACCREDITED IN MOSCOW

(WITH

EXCEPTION FEW CORRESPONDENTS CURRENTLY ON VACATION) MET AUGUST 9 TO
COORDINATE JOINT REACTION TO ULTIMATUMS ON RENT INCREASES RECENTLY
RECEIVED FROM DIPLOMATIC SERVICE AGENCY UPDK. ALTHOUGH SEVERAL
BUREAUS

HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED NOTICE FROM UPDK, MAJORITY HAVE BEEN TENDERED
LETTERS WHICH ORDER THEM TO PAY RADICALLY INCREASED RENT WITHIN
TWO-THREE WEEKS OR VACATE THEIR PREMISES WITHIN SPECIFIED
ONE OR TWO-MONTH PERIOD.

2. DELEGATION OF FOUR CORRESPONDENTS REPRESENTING LARGER CAUCUS

CALLED

ON PRESS AND CULTURAL COUNSELOR AND PRESS ATTACHE AFTER NOON OF AUG 9
TO REPORT ON RESULTS OF MEETING AND TO SEEK EMBASSY SUPPORT. CORRES-
PONDENTS SAID ALL THOSE PRESENT AT CAUCUS HAD AGREED TO WORK IN
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UNISON AND WOULD SEND GROUP LETTERS TO UPDK AND TO MFA PRESS
DEPARTMENT. LETTERS WILL SAY THAT CORRESPONDENTS ARE PREPARED
TO PAY REASONABLE RENT INCREASES EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 1978, AND
ARE READY TO SIT DOWN WITH UPDK TO TALK OVER DETAILS. LETTERS
WILL ALSO CONVEY CORRESPONDENTS' DISMAY OVER HIGHHANDED WAY IN
WHICH UPDK IS ATTEMPTING TO IMPOSE ARBITRARY INCREASES WITHOUT
NEGOTIATIONS, AND WILL REFER TO MFA'S OBLIGATION UNDER HELSINKI

ACCORDS TO FACILITATE IMPROVED WORKING CONDITIONS FOR FOREIGN JOURNALISTS. CORRESPONDENTS ALSO PLAN TO STATE THAT ANY LEASE SUITABLE TO AMERICAN EMBASSY FOR ITS HOUSING WOULD BE SUITABLE TO NEWS ORGANIZATIONS AS WELL. IN THIS REGARD, CORRESPONDENTS WILL REFER TO LETTER SENT EARLIER TO UPDK BY DEAN OF DIPLOMATIC CORPS, CANADIAN AMBASSADOR FORD, IN WHICH DEAN ASSERTED PRINCIPLE OF NON-DISCRIMINATORY TREATMENT FOR ALL FOREIGNERS REGARDLESS OF NATIONALITY OR AFFILIATION.

3. ACCORDING TO FOUR-MAN DELEGATION, CORRESPONDENTS ALSO PLANNING ANOTHER MEASURE DESIGNED TO BRING PRESSURE ON SOVIETS FROM WASHINGTON END. CORRESPONDENTS WILL APPEAL EN MASSE TO JOHN HUGHES OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, WHO IS INCOMING HEAD OF ASSOCIATION OF MANAGING EDITORS OF U.S. PAPERS, TO ASK ASSISTANT SECRETARY HODDING CARTER FOR ASSISTANCE.

4. DELEGATION REQUESTED, AND ONE OF SENIOR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS REPEATED REQUEST TO AMBASSADOR DURING MEETING MORNING OF AUG 10, THAT EMBASSY WHATEVER SUPPORTIVE ACTION IT FEELS APPROPRIATE. CORRESPONDENTS WARY OF ASSOCIATING THEMSELVES TOO CLOSELY WITH EMBASSY, BUT IN THIS CASE THEY FEEL SOME OFFICIAL EXPRESSION OF CONCERN IS WARRANTED. ACCORDINGLY, ON AMBASSADOR'S INSTRUCTIONS, P&C COUNSELOR AND PRESS ATTACHE HAVE TENTATIVELY ARRANGED CALL ON MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT HEAD SOFINSKIY AT 16:00 LOCAL TIME AUGUST 11. WE PLAN TO TELL SOFINSKIY THAT WHILE JUSTIFICATION FOR RENT INCREASES PER SE IS NOT IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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QUESTION, EMBASSY FEELS MANNER IN WHICH UPDK IS HANDLING MATTER IS EXTREMELY ARBITRARY, DISCRIMINATORY, AND NOT IN KEEPING WITH IMPROVING JOURNALISTS' WORKING CONDITIONS. AS STARTER, EMBASSY WOULD SUGGEST UPDK AGREE TO MEET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF MEDIA TO TALK OVER ENTIRE MATTER.

5. COMMENT: ONE LOCAL NEWSMAN CALLED UPDK AUGUST 9 SEEKING EXPLANATION FOR TIME LIMITS CONTAINED IN PAY-UP-OR-GET-OUT ULTIMATUM. IN RARE BURST OF CANDOR OR INDISCRETION, UPDK OFFICIAL TOLD NEWSMAN THAT MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT, NOT UPDK, WAS CALLING SHOTS AND HAD DIVIDED CORRESPONDENTS INTO THREE GROUPS: THOSE RECEIVING ONE-MONTH DEADLINES FOR PAYMENT OR EVICTION, THOSE GETTING TWO-MONTH ULTIMATEA, AND THOSE BEING BEING SENT STRONG DEMANDS FOR PAYMENT BUT WITHOUT CUT-OFF DATE. SMALLER, WEAKER AND MORE FINANCIALLY PRESSED BUREAUS SEEM TO FALL INTO FIRST GROUPING WHILE LARGER AND MORE INFLUENTIAL PUBLICATIONS ARE BEING GIVEN MORE TIME TO COMPLY. CLEAR IMPLICATION (AND GENERAL UNDERSTANDING AMONG CORRESPONDENTS) IS THAT MFA IS ORCHESTRATING OPERATION WITH VIEW TOWARD SQUEEZING PRECEDENT-SETTING RENTS OUT OF SMALLER BUREAUS OR FORCING THEM TO CLOSE; (PRESUMABLY, MFA FEELS NO ONE WOULD GET TOO UPSET ABOUT CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR OR BALTIMORE SUN OR CHICAGO TRIBUNE CLOSING

MOSCOW OFFICES.)

6. ACTION: (A) DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE AWARE OF POSSIBLE
APPROACH BY HUGHES (PARA 3) AND/OR OTHER REPRESENTATIVES OF U.S.
MEDIA ON BEHALF OF THEIR MOSCOW COLLEAGUES.

(B) AS NOTED ABOVE, EMBOFFS PROBABLY WILL CALL ON SOFINSKIY
ON AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 11. APART FROM SUGGESTING THAT MFA AND
UPDK TAKE MORE CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH TOWARD TALKING OVER
DIFFERENCES WITH CORRESPONDENTS, BELIEVE WE SHOULD EXPRESS OUR
CONCERN OVER ANY SOVIET ACTIONS WHICH COULD CONCEIVABLY RESULT
IN CLOSURE OF AMERICAN NEWS BUREAUS IN MOSCOW. DEPARTMENT MAY
WISH TO OFFER MORE SPECIFIC GUIDANCE. THERE IS DELICATE
ISSUE OF SEPARATION OF FREE PRESS AND GOVERNMENT IN PLAY HERE,
BUT WE CLEARLY HAVE LEGITIMATE INTEREST IN U.S. JOURNALISTS'
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WORKING CONDITIONS AND IN MAINTAINING SOME SORT OF NUMERICAL
BALANCE BETWEEN NUMBER OF BUREAUS OPERATING IN MOSCOW AND NUMBER
OF SOVIET BUREAUS IN U.S.
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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition History: n/a
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